

A Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Maine



Edward Leander Higgins
1879-1936

Edward Leander Higgins, a prominent figure among Maine architects during the 1920s and 1930s, made his mark through very traditional designs. His expertise in church architecture made him eminently suited to serve as architect for the Episcopal Diocese of Maine. Three finely crafted Gothic churches in Portland and Camden can be considered his outstanding achievements.

The Higgins family had been residents of Bar Harbor for several generations, when E. Leander was born there on March 8, 1879, the son of Ambrose and Elizabeth Ash Higgins. Young Edward attended local schools before entering the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where he received a degree in architecture in 1905.¹ Upon completion of his studies, he became a draftsman for Boston architect Guy Lowell. Lowell, a well-respected designer, was then working on Portland's Cumberland County Courthouse in association with local architect George Burnham. This project, which was not finished until 1909, brought Higgins back to Maine to work in Burnham's office.²

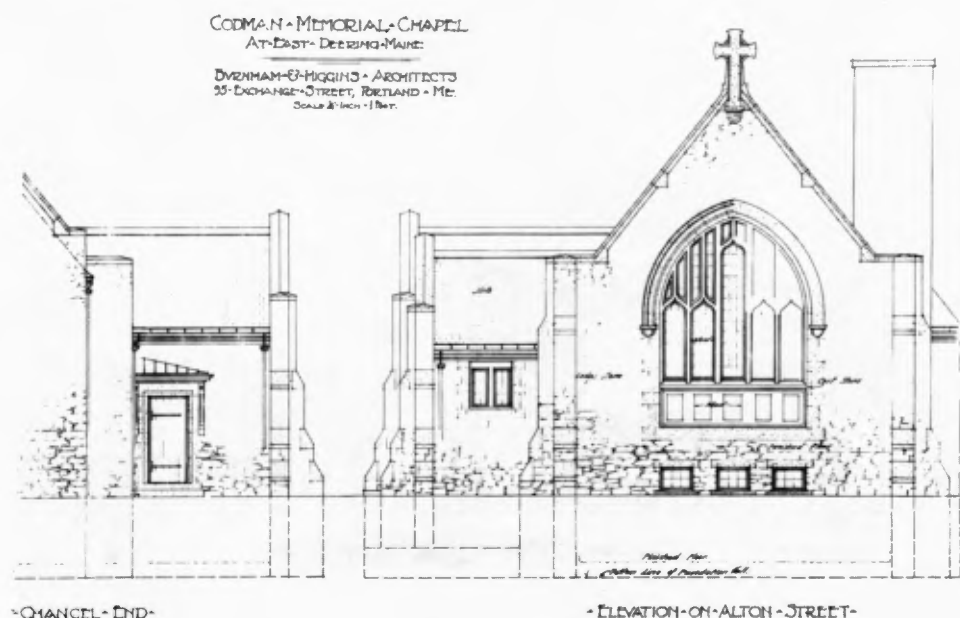


Figure 1. Codman Memorial Chapel, East Deering, 1918, Northwest Elevation (Courtesy Fogler Library, UMO).

By 1912 E. Leander Higgins had become a full partner in the firm, although surviving drawings suggest that he played a prominent role as a designer as early as 1910.³ The new partnership was particularly successful in obtaining residential commissions, although the two men by no means restricted their efforts to that line of work. America's entry into World War I, followed by George Burnham's premature retirement in 1918, put an end to this accomplished team. All of the Burnham and Higgins work dating from 1918 can be credited solely to Higgins, including the Bishop Codman Memorial Chapel in Portland.

Although planned as early as 1916, this church was not begun for two years.⁴ Higgins employed a modest interpretation of the Gothic Perpendicular style, considered by many to be the finest period of English medieval church architecture. A single large lancet arched window with hood moldings fills the west wall of the nave. Constructed of stone, the chapel features a Celtic cross at the peak of the gable end rather than a tower or spire (Figure 1). Built for a small Episcopal congregation in the East Deering section of the city, the chapel was a traditional rectangular plan divided between the nave, chancel and sanctuary. Behind the chair stalls is an organ loft on one side and a robeing room on the other, while the main entrance is gained through a vestibule at the northwest corner of the nave.

By 1922, the year Higgins was hired to design St. Thomas' Episcopal Church in Camden, he had become the Diocesan architect. Through this position he supervised numerous remodellings and additions

to churches from Sanford to Fort Kent. Higgins' own concepts of church design, first evident in the Codman Chapel and amplified in St. Thomas, were clearly influenced by America's leading exponent of Gothic architecture, Ralph Adams Cram. Cram's philosophy, as expressed both in his book *Church Building* and in his designs, included the admonition to, "build a little now, and build it right, instead of trying to build a great deal and as a result building it meanly."⁵

This is particularly evident in the design of St. Thomas' Episcopal Church, which was begun in 1922, continued with the addition of the parish house in 1926, followed by the tower, chapel and cloister in 1930-31. In January, 1921, the architect sent a copy of Cram's book to the Camden rector, Ralph Hayden, to help him formulate his ideas. Rev. Hayden responded by selecting a particular floor plan (No. XXII) and made other suggestions regarding the interior arrangements.⁶ Higgins replied that the suggested floor plan "can be made into a very interesting exterior."⁷

The plan illustrated in Cram's book was not adopted without significant changes. The exterior, which is of stone construction, is again in the Perpendicular style (Figure 2). Window tracery and interior wood work, however, are more lavish than in the East Deering church. Moreover, each addition maintained a high degree of craftsmanship in design and execution. This was particularly true in the last work done under Higgins' direction, the 1930 chapel. Prepared at a time when historical styles were beginning to lose favor with leading architects,



Figure 2. St. Thomas Episcopal Church, Camden, c. 1930 Rendering (Courtesy Fogler Library, UMO).

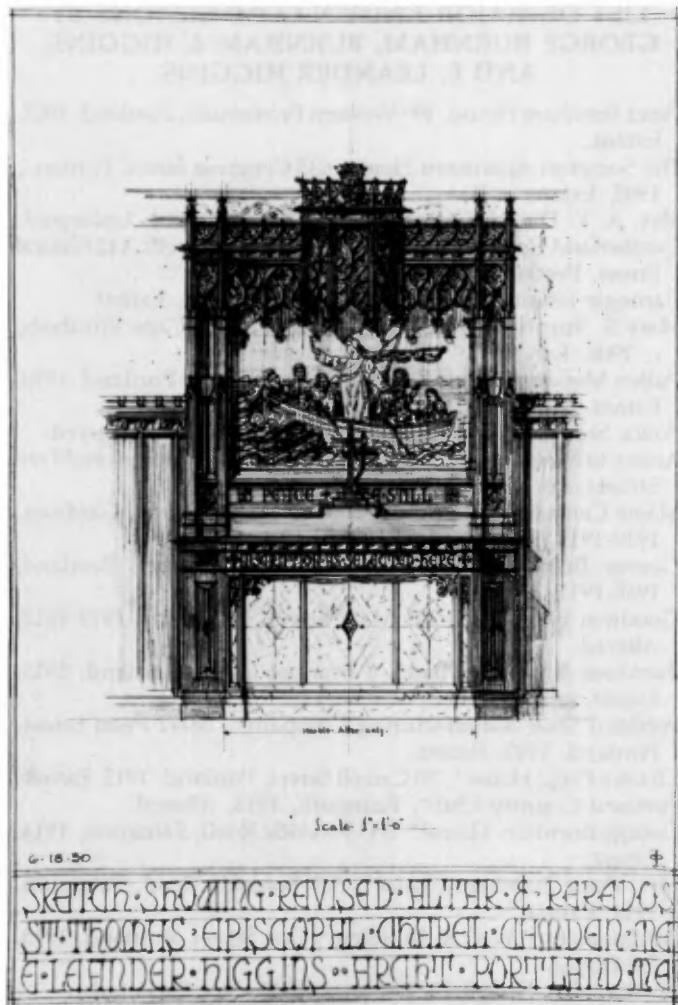


Figure 3. St. Thomas Episcopal Church, Sketch of Altar and Reredos, 1930 (Courtesy Fogler Library, UMO).

the carefully executed drawings for the altar and reredos illustrate the exceptional drafting skills of E. Leander Higgins (Figure 3).

Ironically, the architect's largest church design was not for an Episcopal parish. The Immanuel Baptist Church in Portland of 1926-28 is unlike the earlier buildings in that Higgins had to deal with a constricted urban site.⁸ Erected on a corner lot fronting High and Deering Streets, the complex includes the church and tower, a parish house, cloister and courtyard (Figure 4).

In order to avoid creating a static facade for the High Street elevation, Higgins created multiple planes in the arrangement of buttressing and the placement of the tower. In addition, the main entrance, which is on axis with the nave, is deeply recessed under a lancet arched vestibule. A large Perpendicular style window provides a focus for this principal facade. Linking the tower to the parish house (which contains the chapel) is a cloister which encloses the grass courtyard. This arrangement effectively disguises the rear of the church, which terminates at the backyards of closely neighboring buildings.

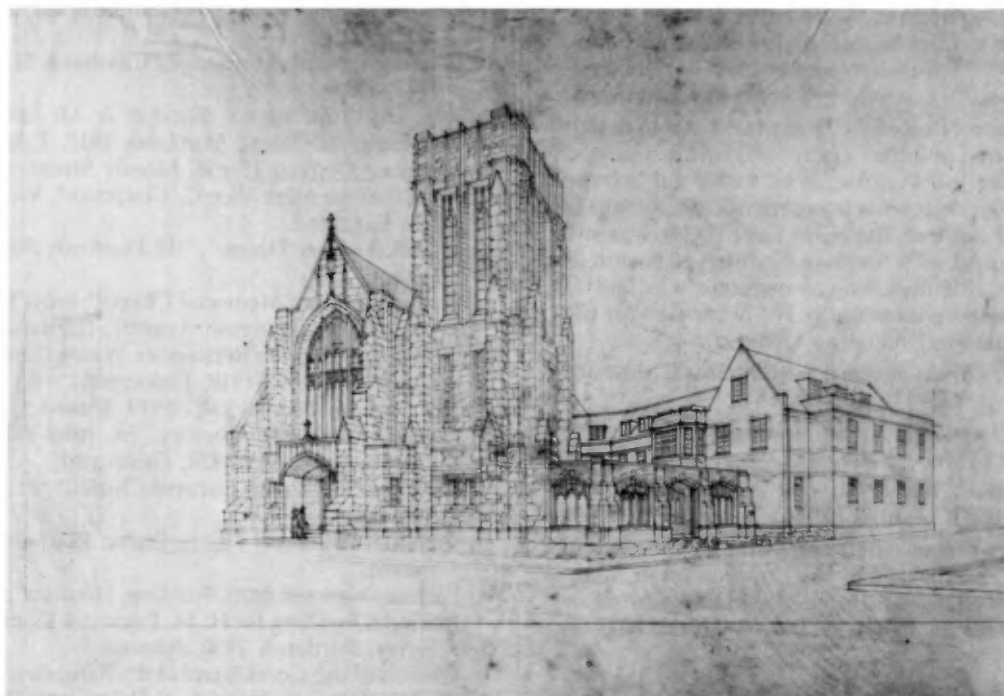


Figure 4. Immanuel Baptist Church, Portland, c. 1926, Perspective View (Courtesy Fogler Library, UMO).

The imposing interior is distinguished for its careful proportions (Figure 5). Immanuel Baptist Church is actually not very large, but a sense of grandeur is imparted with the high ceiling and tall clerestory windows. Without careful planning by the architect, this relatively small nave could have turned out appearing too narrow and compressed.

The practice of E. Leander Higgins included much more than ecclesiastical work. Higgins was responsible for numerous residences and public buildings throughout his career. Yet his traditional inclinations prompted him to avoid experimentation or innovation in modern theories of design. In 1932 his son Ambrose Stevens Higgins, who had attended M.I.T., joined the firm. He continued a successful practice first in Portland and later in Bar Harbor and Bangor after his father's death on October 6, 1936.⁹

Roger G. Reed
December, 1985

NOTES

¹ Harrie B. Coe, Editor, *Maine — A History*, New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, Inc., 1928, Vol. III, p. 428; *Portland Evening Express*, October 6, 1936; Interview with Mrs. Ambrose S. Higgins, July 15, 1984.

² Boston City Directory for 1906, Portland City Directories for 1908-12. See also, "George Burnham 1875-1931" in *A Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Maine*, Vol. I, No. 1.

³ Virtually all of the drawings for the George Burnham firm from the 1910-18 period are with the E. Leander Higgins Papers, Special Collections Department, Raymond H. Fogler Library, University of Maine at Orono. Included is an account book for the period 1910-20, which lists numerous small commissions that were either not executed or were minor alterations.

⁴ Initially, Boston architect Russell W. Porter was hired to design the chapel. A rendering of Porter's proposal, which appeared in *The North East* for July-August, 1916, called for a more stylized Gothic design than what was constructed. As late as the December, 1917 issue of *The North East*, Porter was still credited as the architect with Stephen Codman of Boston as consulting architect. Not until the cornerstone was laid in September, 1918, is there mention in *The North East* for the following month that Higgins is the architect.

⁵ Ralph Adams Cram, *Church Building*, Boston: Small, Maynard & Company, 1901, p. 43.

⁶ Ralph Hayden to E. Leander Higgins, January 8, 1921, Higgins Papers, S.C., F.L., U.M.O.

⁷ E. Leander Higgins to Ralph Hayden, January 15, 1921, Higgins Papers, S.C., F.L., U.M.O.

⁸ The congregation first obtained drawings for a conventional Georgian style design prepared by the Department of Architecture of the American Baptist Home Mission Society. Blueprints for these drawings, dated 1923, are with the Higgins Papers.

⁹ Interview with Mrs. Ambrose S. Higgins, July 15, 1984. In addition to the Higgins papers, Mrs. Higgins and her daughters Sally Curtis and Judith Murphy gave E. Leander and Ambrose Higgins' architectural library to the University of Maine at Orono.

LIST OF MAJOR KNOWN COMMISSIONS BY GEORGE BURNHAM, BURNHAM & HIGGINS, AND E. LEANDER HIGGINS

- Perez Burnham House, 199 Western Promenade, Portland, 1902, Extant.
- The Somerset Apartment House, 633 Congress Street, Portland, 1902, Extant.
- Mrs. A. V. Dimick Cottage*, Watchie pond, 1904, Unlocated.
- Cumberland County Courthouse (with Guy Lowell), 142 Federal Street, Portland, 1904-1909, Extant.
- Carnegie Library, Main Street, Freeport, 1905, Extant.
- Mary S. Burnham House, 365 Cottage Road, Cape Elizabeth, c. 1908, Extant.
- Pullen Memorial Horse Trough, Federal Street, Portland, 1910, Extant.
- Police Station*, Federal Street, Portland, 1910, Destroyed.
- Annex to Porteous, Mitchell & Braun Store*, Congress and Free Streets, Portland, 1910, Extant.
- Maine Central Railroad Station*, 51 Maine Avenue, Gardiner, 1910-1911, Extant.
- George Burnham Houses*, 83-87 Carroll Street, Portland, 1910-1911, Extant.
- Goodwin Block*, 285-301 Main Street, Biddeford, 1911-1912, Altered.
- Burnham & Morrill Plant*, 1 Beanpot Circle, Portland, 1913, Extant.
- Portland Shoe Manufacturing Company*, 38-42 Pearl Street, Portland, 1913, Extant.
- Charles Flagg House*, 70 Carroll Street, Portland, 1913, Extant.
- Portland Country Club*, Falmouth, 1914, Altered.
- George Burnham House*, 333 Foreside Road, Falmouth, 1914, Extant.
- Mrs. Peter Burnham House*, 331 Foreside Road, Falmouth, 1914, Extant.
- Additions to Y.W.C.A. Building*, Oak Street, Portland, 1915, Destroyed.
- St. Barnabas Hospital*, Portland, 1915, Not Executed.
- William F. Leonard House*, 98 Carroll Street, Portland, 1915, Extant.
- Factory for Biddeford Building Company*, Biddeford, 1916, Unlocated.
- Charles Maxey House*, 1134 Shore Road, Cape Elizabeth, 1916-1917, Extant.
- Charles B. Hinds House*, 27 Chadwick Street, Portland, 1916-1917, Extant.
- Remodel Building for Randall & McAllister Company*, 84 Commercial Street, Portland, 1917, Extant.
- Sweetser Orphan Home, Moody Street, Saco, 1917, Extant.
- Bungalow for Miss Alice G. Chapman*, West Bethel, 1917-1918, Not Executed.
- Sidney Thaxter House*, 314 Danforth Street, Portland, 1918, Extant.
- Bishop Codman Memorial Chapel* (now St. Peter's Episcopal Church), Washington Avenue, Portland, 1918, Extant.
- Office Building for Rensselaer Water Company*, Rensselaer, New York, 1918-1919, Unlocated.
- Fire Station, Brunswick*, 1919, Extant.
- Parish House and Rectory, St. John's Episcopal Church*, Presque Isle, 1919-1920, Destroyed.
- Remodel St. Paul's Episcopal Church*, Ft. Fairfield, 1919-1920, Extant.
- Remodel House for Henry Frank, Route 88, Yarmouth, 1920s, Extant.
- Farmers National Bank Building, Houlton*, 1920, Not Executed.
- Remodel Building for H. M. Payson & Company*, 95 Exchange Street, Portland, 1920, Altered.
- Church of the Good Shepherd*, Rangeley, 1920-21, Destroyed.
- Fred Scott Brown House*, 41 Dartmouth Street, Portland, 1922, Extant.
- St. Thomas Episcopal Church*, Chestnut Street, Camden, 1922, Extant.



Figure 5. Immanuel Baptist Church, c. 1930 Interior View (Courtesy Immanuel Baptist Church).

Remodel Rectory, St. Thomas Episcopal Church*, Chestnut Street, Camden, 1922, Extant.
 Alteration to St. Stephen's Episcopal Church*, Portland, 1922, Destroyed.
 Remodel St. Luke's Episcopal Church*, Caribou, 1922, Extant.
 Addition to Chapel on Bailey's Island*, 1922, Extant.
 Security Trust Company Building*, Camden, 1923, Destroyed.
 Remodel Building for C. F. Flagg*, 588 Congress Street, Portland, 1923, Extant.
 H. T. Sands House*, Old Orchard*, 1923, Unlocated.
 Parish House for St. Paul's Episcopal Church*, Pleasant Street, Brunswick, 1924, Extant.
 George Dexter House*, McKowan Point Road, Boothbay Harbor, 1925, Extant.
 Sidney W. Noyes House*, East Sebago, 1925, Extant.
 Cabin for Leonard Price, Houlton*, 1925, Unlocated.
 Theodore Ross House*, Camden, 1926, Extant.
 Immanuel Baptist Church and Parish House*, Portland, 1926-1928, Extant.
 Remodel Parish House, St. Stephen's Episcopal Church*, Portland, 1926, Destroyed.
 Parish House, St. Thomas Episcopal Church*, Camden, 1926, Extant.
 Commercial Building for J. B. Brown & Sons*, 7-9 Free Street, 1927, Extant.
 Lynch Gate for St. Mary's Church*, Falmouth, 1927, Extant.
 Robert Braun House*, Highland Road, Bridgton, 1928, Extant.
 Piazza for Mrs. Enoch Lowell*, Saco, 1928, Extant.
 Mrs. Gertrude Anthony House*, Sea and "S" Streets, Old Orchard, c. 1928, Unlocated.
 Parish House, First Baptist Church*, Sanford, 1928, Unlocated.
 Addition to Parish House*, Standish, 1928, Not Executed.
 Parish House and Church Alterations*, United Baptist Church, Saco, 1929, Altered.
 Walter B. Brockway House*, 74 Highland Avenue, Portland, c. 1929, Extant.
 John W. Oakley House*, Foreside Road, Falmouth, 1929, Unlocated.
 Remodel Marcus Chandler House*, 3 Eaton Avenue, Camden, 1929, Extant.
 Addition to Main Building, Thornton Academy*, Saco, 1930, Extant.
 Chapel and Tower for St. Thomas Episcopal Church*, Camden, 1930-1931, Extant.
 Remodel Store into "English Shops" for E. Leander Higgins*, Main Street, Bar Harbor, 1930-1931, Extant.
 Remodel Town Hall*, Elm Street, Camden, 1931, Extant, Design for Opera House Not Executed.
 E. Leander Higgins Cottage*, Locust Lane, Bar Harbor, 1931, Extant.
 Decorative Wall, Longfellow Garden, Portland, 1934, Extant.
 Maternity Hospital*, Skowhegan, 1935, Destroyed.
 Warehouse for Brown Estate*, Danforth and Maple Streets, Portland, Date Unknown, Extant.
 Restaurant for Arthur B. Fels*, Yarmouth, Date Unknown, Destroyed.
 Remodel St. Mark's Episcopal Church*, Waterville, Date Unknown, Not Executed.

*Indicates drawings in the Higgins papers. Drawings for the Brunswick Fire Station are in the John Calvin Stevens Collection, Maine Historical Society. This list corrects and updates information listed in "George Burnham", Vol. I, No. 1 of this series.



E. Leander Higgins in his Portland office.

Photographs of E. Leander Higgins
 Courtesy of Mrs. Ambrose S. Higgins

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